

# Political Islam and Historical Materialism – An Exchange

Tuesday 31 March 2009, by [AMIN Samir](#), [AMIN-KHAN Tariq](#) (Date first published: March 2009).

**In December 2007, the *Monthly Review* published an article of Samir Amin on political Islam. In March 2009, it published a critique by Tariq Amin-Khan and Samir Amin's answer.**

**On ESSF, Samir Amin original article on political Islam, is available at: [Political Islam in the Service of Imperialism](#).**

**We are now reproducing below Tariq Amin-Khan's Critique and Samir Amin's answer.**

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## Comments on Tariq Amin-Khan's text

### **Samir Amin**

I am not surprised by our Pakistani friend Tariq Amin-Khan's critique. I was expecting it. Therefore, I would like to offer some comments on his criticisms of me, which mainly result from ignorance of what I have written on the questions he raises.

**1.** The purpose of my article was quite simply to defend a political strategy that bets on simultaneously defeating Washington's project (and behind it, the collective imperialism of the triad) for military control of the planet and the project of political Islam ("moderate" or "radical"). Moreover, the title of the paper as published in French is explicit: "Defeating the US Project for Military Control of the Planet and Defeating Political Islam are Two Indissociable Objectives". It appears that Tariq Amin-Khan shares this point of view and, like me, recognizes that the objectives of middle class political Islam (so-called "moderate") and the objectives of the "radical" Islamist militants (recruited from the poor classes) are identical. The disagreements concern our proposals for effective strategies to defeat political Islam and, behind that obviously, concern several fundamental theoretical concepts concerning modernity, Eurocentrism, and the formation of the political cultures of various peoples.

**2.** I have proposed an analysis of "modernity" and its emergence that is closely connected with an analysis of historical capitalism/imperialism that is anything but "Eurocentric" since it is specifically

based on a radical critique of *Eurocentrism*. Tariq seems unfamiliar with my *Eurocentrism*, published by Monthly Review Press in 1989. He could supplement his reading later with the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, which appeared in French in 2008 and is being published soon by Monthly Review Press. My critique of Eurocentrism is radical, in the sense that it is not limited to exhibiting its expressions (as Edward Said did), but seeks to explain it in terms of the emergence of “modernity”, which is itself inseparable from the imperialist expansion of historical capitalism. “Modernity” is thus flawed, contradictory and limited from the beginning, and still is today, because it is “capitalist/imperialist modernity”. What Tariq calls the two modernities (“technologistic”, on the one hand, and one of “liberty, equality, fraternity”, on the other) is exactly what I have written on the subject.

**3.** I am surprised that Tariq could believe that I know nothing about the miserable objective conditions of people in the peripheries (including Muslim countries) caused by capitalism, which are the reasons for the success of contemporary political Islam. I have not only written entire books devoted to the polarization inherent in the world expansion of actually existing capitalism (which, consequently, I associate with imperialism at every stage of its development), but have even quite explicitly related the responses of political Islam (and many other contemporary mass movements) to the destructive effects of capitalism on entire peoples.

**4.** For that very reason, I have never assimilated the political Islam of the modern world with “traditional”, “pre-colonial, pre-modern” Islam. I have even quite explicitly noted the difference. Specifically in *Eurocentrism*, I proposed an interpretation of history prior to capitalist modernity which emphasized the similarities in forms of power, which I called “tributary”, that existed in Medieval Christian Europe, the Arab-Muslim Orient, and Confucian China. See in particular my arguments concerning the metaphysical systems that attempt to reconcile Faith and Reason and their similarities beyond the “specificities” of their expression, which I, consequently, contextualized. I quite explicitly said that the methods for managing modern societies — capitalism in its imperialist centers and dominated peripheries — have nothing in common with those from earlier times and long ago categorically rejected “modernization” theories that propose attacking “traditional vestiges”. I even said that there were no longer such “vestiges” so much as forms traditional in appearance that were remodeled to serve capitalist expansion.

**5.** Political Islam is a modern phenomenon. Tariq does not see that this was my thesis. All of the ideological, political and social movements of the “modern” world (i.e., of actually existing capitalism, which is both globalized and polarizing, thus imperialist by nature) are modern, because they are inseparable from capitalism. Bourgeois democratic liberalism, whether conservative or reformist, socialisms (social democracy, historical communisms), fascisms, ethnocentrisms (or para-ethnic movements), the nationalisms of the imperialist powers, the nationalisms through which dominated peoples express their resistance, movements of “religious renaissance” in all their forms, be it liberation theology, apparently “fundamentalist” revivals, both Christian and others, and new sects, all these movements are “modern”.

**6.** But it is not sufficient to understand them simply as modern. Even more, it is necessary to choose between them and identify those which move society forwards and, on the basis of a critique of capitalist modernity, participate in inventing socialist modernity.

I am a Marxist and defender of the creative potential of Marxism. I think that the tools of historical materialism, and they alone, allow us to understand the true challenges confronting workers and other victims of capitalism and its modernity. Other forms of thought, no less significant (they are even dominant so long as capitalism exists), defend the existing order in the name of bourgeois “liberal democracy” (à la Habermas) or some religious (or para-religious) or ethnic (or para-ethnic) interpretation that includes “respect for property” in its conception of fundamental rights. Some of these formulations have been clearly reactionary; fascism bears witness to that. The fact that the

movements inspired by such formulations have recruited their rank and file from the most disadvantaged classes does not change the reactionary utopian character of these formulations. I include political Islam (even political Islams, in the plural), but also political Hinduism, political Buddhism, North American Christian fundamentalism, new sects and others, in this large family of illusions, apparently attached to the past (but in fact modern) and able to mobilize the “poor” in certain circumstances. Their success, like at the present moment, is the result of the failure of the relevant (socialist) lefts to oppose capital’s offensive, which has seized the historic opportunity provided by the erosion and then collapse of the progressive forces that had formed the world after the Second World War.

History does not always put two clear-thinking groups of forces on stage, some conservative, others progressive. The stage is sometimes occupied by forces that, lacking clear-headedness, trap societies in tragic impasses. I say that political Islam, and others too, are of this nature. I have even written that a goodly number of the “movements” involved in the Social Forums are trapped in such impasses and proposed, beyond analyzing them as such, some principles that could, perhaps, open the way to surpassing them.

I wrote an early critique of the advances that occurred in Asian and African societies during the Bandung era. Beginning in 1963, I analyzed the contradictions and limits of the Nasserist experience and expressed the fear that it would lead Egypt to what became the *infitah* (the comprador opening) and political Islam. This work (Hassan Riad, *L’Égypte nassérienne* [Nasserist Egypt]) circulated clandestinely in Arabic, but was never translated into English. Later developments have not contradicted my fears.

7. The nature of the impasses to which I have referred cannot be analyzed by “post-modernist” methods. In my opinion, so-called “post-colonial” studies currently fashionable in universities in the United States are themselves nothing more than naive expressions of the impasses in question, an opinion that Tariq does not appear to share.

8. I still reject with the same stubbornness any form of “culturalism”, which I have defined as the affirmation of “(para)cultural invariants”. This rejection is at the heart of my critique of Eurocentrism, but also of “inverted Eurocentrisms” (to use Khaled el-Azm’s expression), such as Islamist and other contemporary culturalisms.

Rejecting the culturalist hypothesis, I dared to assert, quite early (see Samir Amin and André Gunder Frank, *L’accumulation dépendante* [Dependent Accumulation], published in 1978), that “modernity” (and capitalism) had been developing across a large part of the pre-capitalist world and not only in Europe. I continued to explore this question through historical research that led me to point to the early invention of modernity initiated in China three to five centuries before Europe. I also dared to advance the argument that this beginning, visible in the Arab-Muslim world from the first centuries after the *hegira*, had ultimately been aborted and resulted in a long “decadence”. Within this context, I placed the reasons why the Arab-Islamic *Nahda* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century did not herald an exit from the impasse, but, on the contrary, more firmly trapped the societies concerned. These writings, published with more detailed arguments in Arabic than in their abridged French (and sometimes English) versions, brought me, of course, many critiques coming from those who seek to become reconciled with political Islam (like Burhan Ghalioun).

Given the triumph of historical capitalism in Europe, it is that version of modernity that has been imposed on everyone else, thereby relegating to historical oblivion other possible paths to modernity.

9. I have never been insensitive to Islamophobia, as Tariq suggests. But Islamophobia is not the only

fear that the dominant authorities promote in Western opinion. What about the Sinophobia fueled by the disgraceful defense of the Dalai Lama's slave-owning theocracy?

The thesis that I have developed in this area is that aging (to the point of becoming obsolete) capitalism/imperialism henceforth needs to commit the collective imperialism of the triad to an ongoing war against the South. The militarization of its globalization is the only means to guarantee access to all the planet's resources for the exclusive benefit of the countries of the North. This obsolete capitalism is preparing what I have called "apartheid on a world scale", which implies collective consent and approval of racist conceptions. Tariq observes this among his students in Toronto, but does not pursue the analysis further.

**10.** I do not believe that the hasty identification of the Islam of European and American communities with the political Islam of the Muslim countries is correct (I am not accusing Tariq of this all too frequent confusion).

Islam in these communities (but also negritude and other phenomena of the same kind) is the obvious result of the social discrimination of which poor immigrants are the victims (before being "cultural"). The "communitarianisms" created by the (reactionary) governments of dominant capital, particularly in the United States and Great Britain, as a way of managing this so-called "diversity" reinforce the impact of the illusory "Islamist" (and other) responses and hinder the involvement of the classes concerned in social struggles for their rights and equality. There is nothing the (socialist) left can expect from (illusory) alliances with the communitarianisms of victims. Its responsibility lies elsewhere. The left should be expected to commit itself to working with the communities concerned in struggling for their rights in the prospect of a socialist renewal.

**11.** It is always risky to examine political Islam in general, without taking adequate account of concrete situations, which differ from one Muslim country to another. I try to avoid this dangerous amalgamation. However, I am not relinquishing the distinction I have proposed between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, on the one side, and the "other Muslim countries" (themselves diverse), on the other.

Concerning Saudi Arabia, I wrote that Wahhabi Islam is extremely rudimentary, a product of the archaic nomadic society of the Arabian Peninsula. This form has become, thanks to the ocean of petroleum upon which Saudi Arabia floats, an ideology of a state that is itself a subaltern ally of US imperialism; in fact, its unwavering servant. I believe that Tariq shares my viewpoint. The fact remains that, thanks to petro-dollars, Wahhabism is dominant in "Sunni" political Islams, with visibly devastating effects: ultra-reactionary social behaviors, empty ritualistic formalism, criminal confessional excesses (hate of the Shia). One must take these realities into account.

Tariq disagrees with me concerning Pakistan. I do not have the presumptuousness to "refute" him in this area. Tariq knows Pakistan from the inside, I from the outside. I would like to believe that what he says about the potential of his society is correct. I hope it is true.

But I remain unconvinced, despite my lack of knowledge about his country. I dared to write that, for me, the very creation of Pakistan was an aberration and that it condemned the country from the very beginning to plunge into an impasse from which I see no escape, even now. Founded on the refusal to see itself as the Muslim provinces of India, Pakistan can only exist on the basis of the continual assertion of its "Islamic" character. The ruling class, even if it wants to distinguish itself from the political Islams of the middle and working classes, can only adhere to the same founding myth. Thus it is not by chance that Pakistan was Washington's client state from the beginning, that it was enlisted — with Saudi Arabia, again not by chance — by the United States to form a counterweight to Bandung by creating an "Islamic Conference". Delhi's diplomacy understood this quite well and

hence chose to move closer to Moscow and even Kabul (at that time called “Communist”). But today both India and Pakistan are Washington’s “friends”, forced to manage the conflict between them as well as they can.

Islam’s, and political Islam’s, situation in the other Muslim countries is quite different. There is generally no confusion here between “national identity” and religious identity. During the Bandung era, and even earlier for some countries, the Arab countries were primarily positive about their Arab nationality (in the singular or plural) and this opened the way to secular advances that were extremely tentative, just like the advances towards democracy. Political Islam here is not a post-colonial phenomenon, as numerous North American academics believe, but a much more recent phenomenon, post-Bandung.

During the colonial period itself, Islam was far from having been at the center of resistance. On this subject, the Islamists have invented a history that is distant from what an examination of reality suggests. The colonial powers understood perfectly well that the exercise of religious authority (here Islam, but elsewhere Hinduism or Buddhism) could be of use to them. The Algerian case is striking in this context: the French never “combated Islam” in their colony. On the contrary, they allowed obscurantist cadis to force complete respect for the “sharia”. It was the Algerian Republic that was hesitantly committed to secular reforms. What the Islamists today call for is nothing other than a return to the practices of colonial times!

Nevertheless, I was — and remain — critical of the “advances” of the Bandung era for their tentativeness in all areas, from the autonomy of economic development to the refusal to democratize the management of society and their determination to support Islam as a counterweight to the “Communist threat”. The popular nationalist regimes thus prepared the way for the comprador/Islamist (the two terms being indissociable) take over. I wrote, concerning Egypt, that the three forces that occupy center stage — political Islam (the Muslim Brotherhood and others), the “regime” and the Americanophile so-called “democrats” — are in reality representatives of one and the same ruling class, comprador and “Islamist”.

**12.** But, Tariq tells us, one cannot ignore the fact that political Islam is at war with the United States.

The Washington Administration says so. It needs to do so because it is the only way to legitimize in the eyes of public opinion in the United States and in its subaltern NATO allies the implementation of its plan for military control of the planet, under the pretext of a “war on terrorism”. However, the wars in question deserve a closer look.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban indeed attack occupation troops. But they are quite ready to rule Afghanistan in complete friendship with Washington on condition that foreign armed forces leave the country. The United States is here actually trapped because it cannot withdraw from the country because that would destroy the force of their ultimate argument, i.e., the “war on terrorism”. Al Qaida is useful, necessary and should not be eradicated.

In Iraq, the attacks of the Islamists are not aimed exclusively against the occupation troops. Should not the CIA’s success in creating a civil war between Sunni Islamists and the Shia be taken into consideration? Undoubtedly, Washington has failed politically, since the regime it protects has no credibility. Yet, on the other side, the Iraqi resistance movements are quite far from being able to defeat the occupying military. In comparison, the Vietnamese succeeded in driving out the occupier without invoking any religious legitimacy whatsoever and without “terrorist” excesses. Does the ideology of political Islam have no responsibility for this Iraqi failure?

In Lebanon, Hezbollah actually inflicted a military defeat on the Israeli attackers. All the same, before them, the Lebanese Communists had proven their ability to do as much in South Lebanon. Hezbollah was established by joint support from Iran, Syria and the Western powers which, despite their differences, feared the Communists more than the Islamists. Hezbollah is, in turn, a political impasse for Lebanon because its political and social project is unacceptable for non-Shia and is probably not even spontaneously accepted with enthusiasm by the Shia, as the Ayatollahs and the Washington Administration want to make us believe it is.

In Palestine, Hamas hardly appears to be any “more effective” in organizing a response to the occupation and Israeli incursions than the “secularists” of other Palestinian organizations were. The latter were eliminated by policies systematically developed by Israel, the United States and Europe.

I have spoken in much more detail on all of these wars than Tariq suspects.

I have difficulty understanding the vehemence of Tariq’s remarks on my position about this subject. For my part, I have no difficulty in understanding why European youth enthusiastically marched behind portraits of Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara and Palestinian flags, but not behind banners of the Ayatollahs and Bin Laden. This should also be understood in Muslim countries.

**13.** Yes, I am in favor of adopting the absolute principle of secularism, of separating politics and religion.

Radical secularism is the condition for implementing a creative democracy, one which does not justify its progress by an interpretation from the past, religious or otherwise, which always acts as a conservative obstacle. Radical secularism is inseparable from the aspiration to liberate human beings and society. That is why radical secularism was proclaimed by all the great revolutions of modern times (the French, Russian and Chinese), which led to the best moments of democratic and social progress. Nevertheless, the progress of secularism was slow, governed by the rhythms of the advances of bourgeois modernity, the beginnings of socialist-inclined advances, which opened the way to go beyond this bourgeois modernity, and also by later setbacks that struck the societies concerned.

Bourgeois modernity itself is a diverse phenomenon. The first hesitant steps towards secularism were taken in Europe in order to put an end to the religious wars and substitute the principle of tolerance for confessional fanaticism.

The United States, formed by dissident sects that had migrated from Europe, established this principle of tolerance but never went further than that in its limited concept of secularism. In Europe, secularism itself was conceptualized in a radical fashion only in close association with the great revolutions, particularly during the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution. Elsewhere, in England, Germany and Italy, bourgeois modernity was able to pave the way for itself only by compromising with the ruling classes of the Ancien Régimes, supported by the Churches. Consequently, secularism in these societies remains limited. I am not afraid of being accused of “Francophilia” here by my stand in favor of the radical secularism invented by the French revolutionaries. I am in good company, with Marx.

Secularism, then, has experienced moments of advance and retreat in connection with the requirements of the political strategies of the dominant blocs on which capitalist reproduction is based. I don’t hesitate to point out that, on this level as on all other levels of social reality, contemporary Europe is going through a phase of declining secularism in connection with the decline of democracy and the assertion of the exclusive power of the oligopolies. The “European constitution” and all the talk about the “Christian” (or “Judeo-Christian”) origins of European

civilization testify to that.

Progress towards secularism was even more limited and slower in the dominated peripheries of the world system for obvious reasons connected with the tentativeness and weakness of the leading political and social forces in the social blocs of the national liberation movements. What was achieved in this area never went beyond the stage of “secularizing advances”, even in Kemalist Turkey, just like advances on other levels were hardly more than “democratizing”.

Pointing out these facts should not lead to the conclusion that radical secularism would be “useless” here and that “moderate” approaches, by reducing the scope of secularism, would be “better”, “more respectful of cultural diversity”. The long transition to socialism, democracy, emancipation and secularism is the only way to move forward. Undoubtedly, progress on this path will be slow, made up of moments of (limited) advances and (possible) retreats. Secularism, as such, and radical secularism do not concern only “European and Christian” peoples, as the Islamists, Hinduists, Buddhist fundamentalists and ideologues of post-colonialism claim. It concerns everyone: no social democratic progress is possible without the abolition of the slave-owning theocracies of political Buddhism, without the abolition of the sacralization of castes by Hinduism, without abandoning the plan for an Islamic state. Strong advances towards liberation from imperialist domination will not happen without progress towards secularism and creative democracy.

Our moment is one of retreat in all these areas, in the Muslim countries and in other countries, South and North alike. Analyzing the reasons for this retreat and considering political strategies that would make it possible to get out of the tunnel are essential for everyone, South and North.

**14.** The question of religious reality, its place in history and in constructing the future, cannot be reduced to the issue of secularism.

I am not one of those who believe that beliefs in the supernatural (thus also their religious forms) will disappear one day “of themselves”. I have written that the human being is a “metaphysical animal” who needs to overcome the anxieties of life (even beyond capitalism) by recourse to an always reinvented supernatural. Again, I am in good company: such is my interpretation of “religion as opium of the people” (according to Marx’s expression). The opium is necessary, it is the only way to alleviate the pain. But it also carries the risk of sleeping, of forgetting the causes of the pain and abandoning the struggle against them.

I have suggested an interpretation of the history of religions (Christianity and Islam, in particular) that emphasizes the internal transformations through which they have survived social changes, thereby allowing them to become compatible with the requirements of capitalist modernity. I salute contemporary attempts to interpret religious beliefs in such a way that they offer support for the struggle for a future socialism, in particular the efforts of Christian “liberation theology”. The Muslim world needs to move in this direction. The 19<sup>th</sup> century Nahda did not do this, I have argued. Political Islam is opposed to doing this. I am forced to note here that the only attempt to move in this direction, by Mahmud Taha, was nipped in the bud by the Islamists. To my knowledge, Taha’s hanging roused the protests of only two “non-believing” Egyptians (Ismail Abdallah and me). No Islamists, not even so-called “revolutionary” ones, found his execution for “attacking the sacred character of dogmas” appalling. Ali Shariati’s attempt to move in this direction in the Iranian Shia world had no repercussions.

Political Islam is not a movement for religious renewal, but only a political movement that mobilizes religious membership in its emptiest, most ritualistic, conformist and reactionary form. Its success does not do away with these characteristics. In these conditions, political Islam could only deviate in the direction of fanatical confessional declarations, leading Sunni and Shia to mutual hatred.

## 15. What to do? How do we reconstruct authentically progressive thought and action?

I have categorically rejected the proposals of “so-called democratic political liberalism” in which “democracy (in the Muslim countries) should adapt itself to accepting a strong social presence of Islam”. Tariq simply commits an error in interpretation when he attributes to me any support for such a proposal. I denounced this proposal and its corollary, the renunciation of secularism.

The progressive left cannot give up ideological combat. In the Muslim countries, it has the duty to make it understood that political Islam is not the solution, but an illusion that hides a capitulation before the real challenges. It must do so on all levels, from the analysis of its founding texts (to which I contributed by my early critique of Sayed Qotb) to analysis of the political strategies of self-described Islamist organizations.

This necessary struggle is nevertheless not sufficient. The major fight, the one that defines the very nature of a progressive (and socialist, obviously) left, unfolds on the terrain of social struggles for the rights of workers (wages, working conditions, union rights, right to strike), peasants (access to land), women (radical reforms in personal status laws) and citizens (access to education, health and housing). Fighting in these areas is not “to substitute these struggles for the struggle against imperialism”. On the contrary, the anti-imperialist fight, which should not be reduced to rhetoric, becomes real and effective only insofar as it is led by the working classes strengthened by the conquest of their rights.

On this plane, the current regimes and the Islamist movements are fundamentally opponents of these social struggles. There is no need to recall the violence of the repressive means they use — together — with the approbation (or silence) of imperialist diplomacy.

There are, however, some signs that indicate the possibility of an escape from the tunnel, in Egypt and Algeria, among other places. The worker strikes in Egypt and Algeria have created the conditions for the emergence of authentic unions. The struggles of Egyptian peasants against the former landowners authorized to recover lands lost during the Agrarian Reform are mobilizing hundreds of thousands of rural inhabitants. All the movements claiming to represent Islam, including those who claim to be the most radical, not only were completely absent in these struggles, but straight away took the official position against them, denouncing the “athiest communists”, the “enemies of sacrosanct property”, etc., who were, according to them, behind it all!

It is upon the development of these struggles, and these alone, with the support of the progressive and socialist left, that the escape from the tunnel, the success of social and democratic advances, the decline of “Islamist” illusions and the necessary progress towards secularism will depend.

### **Readings**

I shall restrict the list to my writings directly concerned with the matter of this paper, preferably English writings, but mentioning also at least the dates of the French originals. I shall not mention Arabic writings, of little use probably for foreign readers.

#### ***Books in English***

*Eurocentrism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989 (French 1988)).

*Delinking* (London: Zed 1990 (French 1985)).

*Maldevelopment* (London: Zed (French 1989)).



*Obsolescent Capitalism* (London: Zed 2003 (French 2002)).

*The Liberal Virus* (New York: Monthly Review Press 2004 (French 2003)).

*Beyond US Hegemony* (London: Zed, 2006 (French 2005)).

*The World We Wish to See* (New York: Monthly Review Press 2008 (French 2006)).

Samir Amin and Andre Gunder Frank, *Let's not Wait for 1984* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981 (French 1978)).

### **Books in French**

*Du capitalisme à la civilisation*, Syllepse 2008. (English translation coming soon, Tulika Publ. India)

*Modernité, Religion, Démocratie* (Lyon: Parangon 2008 (expanded edition of *Eurocentrism*, English translation, Monthly Review Press, coming soon)).

*L'hégémonisme des Etats Unies et l'effondrement du projet européen* (Paris: L'Harmattan 2000). (partial English edition in: Nils Anderson (ed),

*International Justice and Impunity: The Case of the US* (Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2008).

Samir Amin and André Gunder Frank, *L'Accumulation dépendante* (Paris: Anthropos, 1988).

### **Articles in English**

"Imperialism and Culturalism Complement Each Other", *Monthly Review*, June 1996.

"The Theocratic Temptation: Judaism, Christianity, Islam", *Dialectic, Cosmos and Society*, N° 12, 1999

"Confronting the Empire", *Monthly Review*, August 2003.

\* From <http://www.monthlyreview.org/090330...>

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## **Analyzing Political Islam: A Critique of Traditional Historical Materialist Analytic**

### **Tariq Amin-Khan**

Political, [1] more so, militant Islam has become an influential religious and social force in many post-colonial states. [2] The militants face very little by way of real political opposition within Muslim-majority societies, but they are now targeted and attacked militarily by the United States, other Western imperial interests, and client post-colonial states. In the context of the war in Iraq, the occupation of Afghanistan, and the "war on terror," much has been written by people on the left. But, there is little by way of understanding political Islam from a historical materialist perspective. Some months back, however, Samir Amin offered his traditional historical materialist analysis of

political Islam (*Monthly Review*, December 2007) and very briefly touched on a range of issues, such as modernity, secularism and imperialism. Amin has been generally dismissive of political Islam and unambiguous in saying that Islamists have been in the “service of imperialism.”

The concern with such a dismissal is its inability to provide a critical grasp of political Islam as an ideological phenomenon, and the current role of U.S. imperialism in targeting militant Islam and in controlling political outcomes in Muslim-majority states. [3] Such a view is also unhelpful for small left-wing and secular forces in these states to develop even a modest strategic initiative to contest political and militant Islam’s claims—an initiative that moves away from Western and Orientalist characterization of political and militant Islam, and begins to challenge the latter’s social base of support in Muslim-majority states. This social base, it must be clarified, underscores popular anger against U.S. military occupations of Muslim lands and the perception that the imperial onslaught as such is against Muslims. The popular anger against the United States can be gleaned from the expression of unfavorable sentiment by 78 percent of the population in Egypt, Jordan, and Pakistan which, paradoxically, are all U.S. client states. [4] However, there is also easy slippage in interpreting this anger against the United States as an endorsement for militant Islam’s obscurantist vision of society, on which more is said below.

Amin’s piece does not deal with the role of larger social and economic issues (including the impact of capitalist globalism) in Muslim-majority states—issues that may partly explain why the abysmally poor join the ranks of militant Islam. More significant, Amin suggests that political Islam is “lined up behind the dominant powers on the world scale” (p. 3), but does little to explain how this has come about given that militant Islam is now also confronting the United States and its imperialist occupation of and forays into Muslim-majority states. This new reality of military confrontation between former collaborators is not to suggest that political Islam’s actions are anti-imperialist. Rather, my concern here is to advance a critical historical materialist understanding of political Islam that is partly in agreement but also in collegial disagreement with some of Amin’s analysis. An understanding that problematizes Eurocentrism embedded in the treatment of militant Islam and the notion of modernity, while distinguishing my work from an orthodox materialist outlook. The critical materialist analysis employed here is also mindful of the oppressive practices of political Islam’s followers, especially concerning the treatment of women. The obscurantist mullahs have denied even the simplest pleasures of song and celebration, while the self-righteous patriarchal stranglehold of this tendency within Islam has been extremely debilitating for women and for much of society. However, militant Islam today is also a powerful social reality that is influencing and altering culture, language, and social and political policy in Muslim-majority states and in the Muslim diaspora of Europe and North America. Regretfully, this reality is not given much attention by many on the left in Western and even some in Muslim-majority states.

A related tendency on the left is to dismiss political Islam as reactionary. This tendency undergirds an uncritical embrace of Enlightenment modernity, and appears to conflate political Islamists with the followers of Islam (Muslims in general)—a conflation that is indeed integral to the dominant narrative in Western societies of “the Muslim” as violent, as oppressor of women, and as a medieval aberration against modernity. I will address below this issue of modernity and the characterization of Muslims in general. However, I will begin by touching on areas where there is agreement with Amin’s analysis.

As a starting point, there cannot be any quarrel with the view that political Islam has historically collaborated with U.S. imperialism throughout the period of the Cold War. This began very early in the 1950s with support for Ikhwanul-Muslimeen (Muslim Brotherhood) and ended when the Afghan mujahideen felt they were left in the lurch with the closing of the tap of U.S. arms flow, Saudi financial support, and Pakistan’s military training and assistance following the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. However, just as this collaboration ended, around the early 1990s, the

demonization of Islam and the civilizational clash thesis was quickly developed by the likes of Bernard Lewis (later picked up by Samuel Huntington in his infamous *The Clash of Civilizations*), which reflected the post-Cold War shift of U.S. foreign policy, whose framework no longer needed political Islam's support.

The one significant continuity between the Cold War era's targeting of Marxist and leftists and the current attacks on political/militant Islam is United States' continued reliance on culturalism to promote its imperial dominance. Western political leaders and the media, and liberal capitalist state's organic intellectuals have been steeped in culturalism since the heydays of post-1945 era and the launching of Modernization theory—creating binaries between “traditional” and “modern” cultures, and “freedom” and “totalitarianism” to contrast the “free enterprise” Western capitalist culture broadly as a superior culturalist paradigm than other preceding or prevailing non-Euro/American cultures. However, this imperial strategy, more recently, has run into bad weather because the Islamists have been even more effective in using the culturalist terrain to mobilize their base of support against what they claim is U.S. “evil design” on Muslims and “Muslim values.” This culturalism of political Islam conceals the social and economic disfigurement caused by capitalist globalism and redirects political questions on to the terrain of culture. Thus, I am in agreement with Amin that culturalism has to be opposed, but the bigger question is: Who will mobilize people against culturalism of militant Islam in Muslim-majority states?

Also, I am in agreement with Amin that if the left is to be viable again in post-colonial societies, it just cannot gain credibility by making alliances with political or militant Islam. Such alliances are counterproductive and will hurt progressive forces in the long run. In this context, Amin claims that political Islam defends property relations and “aligns itself with the camp of dependent capitalism and dominant imperialism” (p. 1). However, I disagree with the sweep of his claim. Undoubtedly, political Islam is neither anticapitalist nor against property relations, but in the current conjuncture it is also not “an invaluable ally” of imperialism—although the two feed off each other. In other words, imperialist occupation is the oxygen for militant Islam's survival, and more coherence is needed to understand how U.S. imperialism and client Muslim-majority states perpetuate the rise of political/militant Islam. Given that I am getting into my disagreements with Amin, I will expound on areas of concern in Amin's historical materialist analysis.

I will first deal with Amin's interpretation of modernity and secularism, and his claim that “perhaps even democracy” may need to “adapt to the strong presence of Islam” (p. 4). Such a view is fairly prevalent in Western mainstream thought and even in many left circles. This view belies that political Islam is a modern manifestation, albeit as modernity not grounded on the Enlightenment principles. As a corollary, such a perspective also then slips into an Orientalist understanding of political and militant Islam, viewing these phenomena as medieval aberrations—as appears to be the tendency of Western mainstream media, politicians, and others.

Now there is no denying, as Amin rightly points out, that modernity represents “a rupture in world history” following two significant developments—the emergence of the Enlightenment ideas and the rise of industrial capitalism—whose unfolding in close proximity of each other shaped the course of Western economic and societal transformation. But even within this understanding, there were two parallel trajectories: one based on the notion of progress as the progress of technology and economic development, and the other, based on the French Revolution slogan of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. However, given the domination of capitalism, “development” as progress has become the dominant motif of modernity, while the latter ideas have taken a backseat to the drift of “instrumental reason” and a formal notion of democracy. Even the “rupture” that Amin speaks of was violent and effacing of preceding social traditions and outlook. In this sense, the notion of modernity has become closely associated with the ideas of Euro/American liberalism and congealed as a “mode of consciousness,” whereby modernity's historical significance, as Philip Lawrence

argues, lies in the manner in which “it self-consciously cut its links with all that had gone before.” [5] As a result, rationalism and modernity “unleashed forces which were able to vanquish the past and... [the] less technologically powerful cultures”—which meant that the Enlightenment project cut its links with its own historical past and with the “non-European world,” and this was done with “extreme violence.” [6] This violence of modernity and the erasure of the high points of other cultures, which European colonial powers were able to dominate and treat as “backward” or “barbaric,” also meant that the Eurocentric worldview would be privileged and universalized over the supposedly historyless and cultureless non-European world. It is this erasure of the non-European that gives the project of Enlightenment modernity its strong Eurocentric impulse: shaping empire-building projects on the one hand, while on the other, inferiorizing the colonized elite to a point wherein they have internalized the ideas of modernity, especially the notion of the “normal” nation-state [7]—the edifice that enabled colonial empires and current dominant Western states to tame colonial and post-colonial societies. This imperialist thrust of the past and the present has severely undermined and restructured the economic and political dimension, compartmentalizing thought and action, and displacing social upliftment ideas of Third Worldism and autarky with neoliberal restructuring and the re-imposition of the social and cultural legacies of the colonial state.

In being inattentive to this analytical complexity, and not recognizing the double-edged blade of modernity—issues not unknown to Amin—the irony is that he takes a similarly narrow view in discussing secularism. He dismisses as reactionary the claim of political Islamists that there is no separation between politics and religion—assuming that all forms of separation or the privileging of science is ipso facto progressive. How is this view in Islam any more reactionary from the contrived separation of religion in the secular fundamentalist thought of Dawkins and Hitchens? It would be more helpful to discuss how harm may result if the two remain unseparated, and whether not separating politics and religion in Islam is more harmful in comparison to other non-Muslim religions that also advocate for their unity? In tackling this question, it can be said that Islamic religious parties and political Islam generally have historically used the notion of Islamic revivalism to return the era of the caliphate, when the political and the sacred were first merged. Islamic revivalism attempts to reclaim the medieval era’s “golden period” of Islam’s formation, and political Islamists harken back to the period of the caliphate in order to reintroduce sharia in the contemporary period. However, this harkening back is a political tool of mobilization—albeit along very narrow patriarchal and conservative lines—and also a way to posit a distinct identity for political Islam, one that is separate from the project of Western secular separation between church and state. In this context, Islamic revivalism is at best a late nineteenth century development, and the actions of political Islamists have formed in the period when Western modernity had its greatest influence in the colonies—that is, both are articulated in the spread of Western education, the propagation of the ideology of nationalism, and the emergence of anticolonial movements. As such, political Islam and its militant tendency should be seen as a contemporary political response to a “moral decline” that is perceived to have accompanied Western modernity. This is a powerful argument for the recruitment of potential foot soldiers of militant Islam. This argument is also a challenge to the European paradigm of modernity and cannot be dismissed as just a medieval aberration. The political Islamist position is as much a “modern” manifestation—albeit not within a Eurocentric notion of capitalist modernity.

On this issue of “moral decline,” there is no question that militant Islam’s position is deeply troubling, effacing and violent. This response is historically part of just one among a range of manifestations—reactionary at one end and mildly progressive at the other—which has unfolded since the late colonial era of the 1920s as Muslim religious groups and parties began to insert themselves in the more powerful secular-oriented anticolonial movements, such as in colonial Algeria, Indonesia, India and other states. By examining this history, one becomes aware that the larger aim of such Islamist anti-colonial movements historically had little to do with the right to self-

determination of nations and more with enlarging an impositional pan-Muslim nationalism for which the separation of politics and religion made little sense. But this pan-Islamist drift continues to have a strong potential to harm weaker and smaller subnational groups by denying them the right of self-determination, examples of which abound in multiethnic/multinational Muslim-majority states. However, the harmful effects of pan-Islamic nationalism have been rarely taken up by the Western left or even by secular and national or subnational groups in Muslim-majority states.

On this issue of harm, it needs to be said that one often overlooks how the Enlightenment notion of modernity has also had debilitating and harmful consequences for the former colonized. Social and economic harm was done in universalizing the narrow conception of Western capitalist modernity as a 'superior' culturalist paradigm in relation to traditional societies, which have been treated as 'backward' and needed to be 'civilized'. This rationale was implemented in the colonies once the charter companies (the British and Dutch East India companies) were dissolved and the colonial state was formally established—for instance, in parts of Asia since the mid 1800s. This issue of modernity's universalization also concerned Fanon, and he was keenly aware of the impact of this cultural imposition on the former colonized and now the imperialized. He recognized much earlier from a more materialist understanding (than the current postcolonial theorists) that the colonized began to internalize the colonizer's culture and the racism embedded in it as power and colonial domination was asserted to take hold of the cultural terrain in the colony. In speaking about the adoption-abandonment binary—the adoption of the colonizer's culture and the abandonment of the culture of the colonized [8]—Fanon is also conscious, unlike the current postcolonial theorists, that the lost culture cannot be retrieved and that culturalism can also be a trap. However, the psychosocial and economic harm to the colonized is something that has endured well into the post-colonial era.

Moving from issues of modernity and secularism, a critical historical materialist understanding also needs to assess the nature of political Islam's social base of support in Muslim-majority societies. On this issue, Amin claims that in countries like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, the upper classes are the main supporters of political Islam. Now, this assumption may be valid for Saudi Arabia, [9] but it is definitely not true for Pakistan. There are other inaccuracies about Pakistan in Amin's piece, but I will not get into them here. The support for political and militant Islam in Pakistan comes from the middle class and religious political parties, with the upper classes taking strategic decisions in defense of or opposition to political Islam depending on policy or ideological shifts within the post-colonial state. However, the foot soldiers of militant Islam are the dreadfully poor who have relied on the madrassahs for their very survival, and have been politicized and radicalized to pick up the gun in defense of what their indoctrination tells them: Islam is under threat from a non-Muslim, Judeo-Christian axis. Before this, it was "godless" Communism that was painted as a threat to these true believers, and as is now the case, eager recruits who have nothing save the shirts on their backs been willing to wage jihad in order to "save Islam." The purveyors of this logic are not confined to Afghanistan or Pakistan, but are busy in the poor forgotten settlements and the terrible squalor that is the reality of urban and rural life of most Muslim-majority states, as also of largely the Third World. So the Islamist sales pitch provides a very small dose of material and a large vial of moral support that rekindles hope in these new recruits. However, the power brokers of client post-colonial states—in furthering their feudal and capitalist class interests as well as the civilian and military bureaucratic elite's auxiliary class interests—have never given a damn about the poor despite the populist parties' promises of roti, kapra aur makan (food, clothing and shelter). As a result, these classes remain callous and inept to match the zeal and commitment or the organizational abilities of militant Islam's recruiters. Consequently, the chasm between the middle class (the rich become a whole other comparator) and the desperately poor continues to widen, and more people have fallen through this gap and into the madrassahs of militant Islam. In this context, political/militant Islam is also a big beneficiary of neoliberal capitalist globalism. Alongside, the United States uses the social

and economic dislocations caused by neoliberalism to supplant its imperial militarist moves in Muslim-majority countries by enlisting the support of its client governments in these states. Such a deliberate move to enlist support further fan the flames of hatred against the United States and these client governments, and strengthens the social base of militant Islam's support. I say deliberate because as many informed writers have pointed out, the "war on terror" is really the "Long War" for access to Central Asian and Middle Eastern energy resources and the consolidation of the military-industrial complex, and now the security-industrial complex [10]—and political and militant Islam have become the perfect foil for the maintenance of this heightened state of U.S. militarism and the national security state to safeguard its long term objective.

This larger objective is driving U.S. military planners to maintain a long term military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan—although it is becoming abundantly clear that militant Islam cannot be defeated militarily. Thus, the burden shifts on the people in client Muslim-majority states to force their governments to change course so that the twin scourge of U.S. imperialism and militant Islam can be removed.

For a country like Pakistan where there is a phenomenal disconnect between the aspirations of its people and the clientalism of the ruling classes, a lazy reading of the country's social and political dynamics can lead to very misleading results. This, given that the downtrodden people in Pakistan have struggled hard for the maintenance of national sovereignty, almost never giving the religious parties more than 8 percent of the popular vote, [11] while also fighting to introduce the rule of law, and trying to keep Islam within the private and personal realm. But all this effort goes unacknowledged if the analysis is mainly focused on the upper classes, which then makes it convenient to lump Pakistan with Saudi Arabia. Pakistan is now fast becoming central to a revised U.S. strategy for the "defeat" of the Taliban and generally militant Islam. The current civilian government is not very different from the previous military dictators in prostrating before the United States and its demands. This, in the face of imperial arrogance that involves almost daily violations of Pakistan's territorial sovereignty by U.S. drones that rain Hellfire missiles on largely women and children.

Therefore, in summarily dismissing political Islam, its larger project is obscured. This project has been spelled out very clearly by both political and militant Islamists, which is to capture state power. As a way to advance this objective, the *mullahs* and the Amirs lull their followers into believing that once state power is captured, the enforcement of sharia will end exploitation and bring a "just Islamic welfare society" in operation. Such fairy tales can be effectively countered if there is an organized left in Muslim-majority states. But the left in these states has been so hounded and beaten in the past 50 years of repression that reorganizing and regrouping them from the ground up seems to be a Herculean task. More important, if the Western left's dismissive attitude toward political and militant Islam is also adopted by secular and miniscule left-wing forces, such as in Pakistan, they will not have even an outside possibility of organizing an alternative to these regressive religious forces. Militant Islam's violent and often brutal actions are the material reality of existence in Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen. So, if the progressive and secular groups are to have even an outside chance of confronting political Islam, there will be no substitute for a critical understanding of this social phenomenon.

On Islamophobia, Amin says that it needs to be opposed, but then also blames the followers of political Islam for their "reactionary anti-Western discourse" which, in his view, gives rise to Islamophobic racism in the first place. In effect, he sees Islamophobia and anti-Western "discourse" as two reactionary campaigns that feed off each other.

Islamophobia is a critical issue on which Amin seems to have missed the boat. He appears to be blaming the victim, which is unfortunate given how events have unfolded in the United States and

Europe as well as in Canada, where virulent racist attacks (verbal, physical, and in print) against Muslims have become a common occurrence. The moves at the level of the European states toward an underlying racist assimilation—for instance, in the development of the concepts of “community cohesion” and “civic integration” in Britain and the Netherlands, respectively—have meant the specific targeting of Muslim communities. At the institution in Toronto where I teach, which has probably one of the most diverse student body in the world, white supremacist groups have emerged, calling themselves a “white minority.” This and other groups are not just targeting Muslims, but also Black and Indigenous people. As Indigenous people have started to assert their treaty rights to land, a torrent of racist attacks have been unleashed on them. What this means is that Muslim-bashing may have been the trigger for the assertion of white supremacy, but it is now on the rise and affecting other communities. Therefore, one needs to be extremely careful in dismissing Islamophobia in a cavalier manner.

Finally, an important aspect of historical materialism is a keen attentiveness to history, a characteristic that has eluded Amin’s gaze. As an example, Amin has viewed political Islam mainly as a post-colonial development. Such a view disregards the colonial era origins of political Islam, an era that was very different from the current dominant tendency of Wahabi/Salafi/Deobandi political Islam. For instance, there has been an anticolonial component of political Islam reflected in the movements in colonial India and colonial Algeria. Also, while there is much that is obscurantist, antiwomen, and demeaning in the current tendencies of political/militant Islam, there have been and continue to be more “modernist” impulses among upper-class Muslims in Egypt, India, Indonesia, Lebanon, Pakistan, and other states with a significant Muslim population. Alongside, there have been other Muslim political thinkers and philosophers who have not accepted the Enlightenment notions of modernity, and have engaged with modernism (Mohammed Iqbal), [12] while Islamic currents and inclusivist tendencies, such as syncretism among South Asian Muslims and Hindus for instance have been prevalent since the precolonial period of Mughal rule in India. This has extended in the colonial era, and towards a Muslim orientation of anticolonial movements (Abul Kalam Azad). Mentioning these tendencies of political Islam is not to disregard the large body of literature from Iranian Muslim philosophers, such as Ali Shariati and others, and their engagement (problematic as it may be) with Marxism and modernism.

However, if this history informs a critical historical materialist analytic, then the Saudi Wahabi-imperialist nexus of the current project of political Islam can be clearly separated from other currents of political Islam. These other currents have weakened in the face of the enormous imperialist and client Muslim-majority states’ earlier support—enabling the rise of the dominant Wahabi political/militant Islam and the spread of jihad and the proliferation of the madrassahs.

## **Conclusion**

The point is that if the left is ever to become serious in challenging militant/political Islam, it has to move past and dump its heavy baggage of Eurocentrism and the careless analysis of political Islam. The current wave of militant Islam is a force to reckon with, and dismissing it as reactionary—true as it may be—is unhelpful. Yes, militant Islam has an extremely narrow ideological view of Islam, and an exceedingly oppressive vision of societal change, especially concerning the treatment of women. This vision is not shared by the vast majority of Muslims in Afghanistan, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, and even India. That being said, this dominant obscurantist current of political Islam in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan is also locked in military/guerilla combat with U.S. imperial power and client states in the region. But here’s the rub, militant Islam is also supported by people in these respective regions not, as mentioned earlier, because they support its vision of a Muslim “welfare state”; rather, the support is because the United States is seen as ruthless, anti-Islam imperial occupier. Alongside, people in these states are also very tired of the tactics of Islamists, especially as they terrorize and target unarmed and uninvolved people. Overwhelming numbers in Muslim-majority

states would like the Islamists to disappear, just as they would also wish the same for U.S. imperial presence and the client regimes that rule over them. If this complexity could be grasped, it may enable people on the left as well Western political leaders and the media to desist from homogenizing the makeup of entire Muslim-majority societies as reactionary or obscurantist. Similarly, the popular anti-imperialist sentiment in Muslim majority states should not be confused with the actions of militant Islamists, which are not anti-imperialist. Militant Islam is conceived and imagined in the present, current context. It is, therefore, a “modern” manifestation that posits its own version of the Islamic “welfare state” for the current conjuncture to rival the Western capitalist state and Enlightenment notions of modernity. Understanding militant Islam in its current context will only enable the development of a coherent strategy of opposition and an alternative non-Eurocentric vision of society.

## **Tariq Amin-Khan**

\* From <http://www.monthlyreview.org/090330...>

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## **Footnotes**

[1] In distinguishing between political and militant Islam, the former can be seen as having a doctrinaire understanding of Muslim religious texts interpreted largely by an educated urban middle class group of ideologues whose ideological project is to capture state power and impose a narrow version of sharia. Political Islam’s rank and file is made up of students, and some members of the urban working class, rural workers and the peasantry. Political Islamists, ever since decolonization, have relied on the patronage of authoritarian rulers and petty bourgeois merchants, and on the limited use of violence for political mobilization and to influence state policy in Muslim-majority states. Militant Islamists, in contrast, recruit their foot soldiers from the urban and rural poor and its ideological diehards from the petty-bourgeoisie, working class and students. In some cases, rural/tribal heads may also lead a militant group. Militant Islamists are armed as trained guerilla units capable of doing battle with the state and even imperialist powers, while also willing to use terror tactics in order to attain their ideological and political ends. The objective of political Islam are the same as militant Islam, but the means of achieving state power differ between them: the former largely tread the constitutional/legal terrain, while the latter relies on the extra-constitutional path to achieve its ends.

[2] The term “post-colonial” state is used here to periodize from the colonial era the decolonization and formation of states in Africa and Asia. Also, since these African and Asian states were decolonized after World War II, they are distinguished from Latin American states that were decolonized 60 to more than 100 years prior to that war. The hyphenated form of the term is meant to highlight this periodization and to also suggest that the post-colonial state remains the key instrument of the South’s subordination—both internally, in undermining civil society, and as the facilitator of external domination.

[3] I have argued elsewhere that the Pentagon has claimed the “war on terror” is the “Long War” and the United States is in this for the long haul because of various reasons: access to energy resources of the Middle East and Central Asia, the unprecedented expansion of the military-industrial complex, and to intensify the synergy between Big Oil, military, and the corporate establishment. See Tariq Amin-Khan, “The Rise of Militant Islam and the Security State in the Era of the ‘Long War,’” *Third World Quarterly* (forthcoming).

[4] The figure was mentioned on CNN’s program, *The Next President: A World of Challenges*, September 20, 2008.



[5] Philip K. Lawrence, "Enlightenment, Modernity and War," *History of the Human Sciences* vol. 12, no. 1 (1999): 3-4.

[6] Lawrence, "Enlightenment," 4.

[7] The internalization of the "normal" nation-state by the former colonized elite in post-colonial societies tries to mimic state formation on the model of European nation-states without much concern for state-building and nation-building by way of respectively removing the legacies of the colonial state and resolving ethnic and national questions. This internalization issue is discussed in Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, eds., *States of Imagination: Ethnographical Exploration of the Postcolonial State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 8-27. Back Frantz Fanon, "Racism as Culture," in *Toward the African Revolution (Political Essays)* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967), 29-44.

[8] Frantz Fanon, "Racism as Culture," in *Toward the African Revolution (Political Essays)* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967), 29-44.

[9] In the context of the claim of support for political Islam from upper classes in countries like Saudi Arabia, it is the upper class and the Saudi state that have together actively promoted—initially with the tacit support and now a grudging acceptance of the United States—the promotion of the Wahabi version of Islam within its society and in many Muslim-majority states.

[10] Jim Holt, "It's the Oil," *London Review of Books*, October 18, 2007, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n20/holt01...>

[11] The one exception was when General Musharraf decided to support Bush's "war on terror" and put the country and military at the United States' disposal. As a result, in the ensuing 2002 elections, a coalition of religious parties was able to form a majority government in the North-West Frontier Province, which also became the main opposition at the federal level. However, in the ensuing February 2008 election, the religious parties were routed and received much less than the "normal" 8 percent level of votes that they have been receiving historically.

[12] Mohammed Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Islamabad: Alhamra, 2002).